

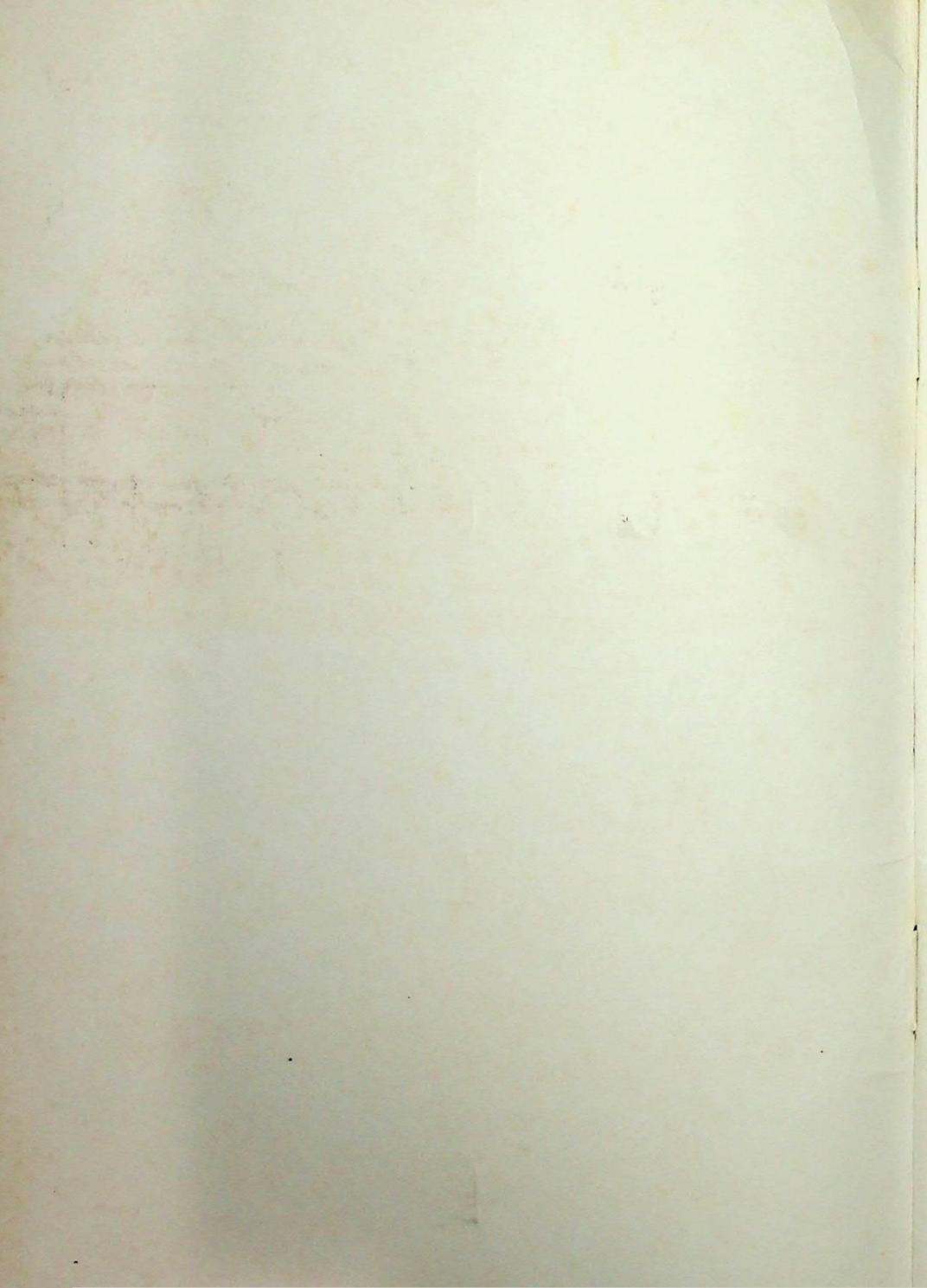
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SETU RAMA
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Ramakrishna Temple at Belur Math

The Ramakrishna Movement



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The Ramakrishna Movement

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'No one is a stranger. The whole world is your own.'

—Sarada Devi



**The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture
Gol Park, Calcutta 700 029**

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List of selected books

I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhistic temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his Law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of every one. Not only shall I do all these, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future.

—Swami Vivekananda



Sri Ramakrishna (1836 -1886)

Sri Ramakrishna was born Gadadhar Chatterjee in 1836 at Kamarpukur about sixty miles from Calcutta. His parents, Khudiram and Chandramani, were poor and made ends meet with great difficulty. They spent most of their time worshipping their family deity, Raghuvir, whom they looked upon as their patron and protector.

Gadadhar was the pet of the whole village. He was handsome and had a natural gift for the fine arts. He, however, disliked going to school. When asked why he did not want to go to school, his reply was: 'The so-called education is for earning money only; I don't care for this kind of education.' He loved Nature and spent his time in fields and fruit gardens outside the village with his friends. Now and then, he went into ecstasies. A line of white cranes against black monsoon clouds, singing religious songs or acting in a religious drama sent him to ecstasies.

Gadadhar lost his father at the age of seven. He became more serious from now on, but he did not change his ways and habits. For instance, he would not go to school. Instead, he was seen visiting monks who stopped at his village on their way to Puri. He would serve them and listen with rapt attention to the arguments they often had among themselves over religious issues.

Gadadhar had now attained the age when he should be invested with the sacred thread. When arrangements were nearly complete for this, Gadadhar declared that

he would have his first alms as a brahmin from a certain Sudra woman of the village. This was something unheard of ! Tradition required that it should be a brahmin and not a Sudra who would give him the first alms. This was pointed out to him but he was adamant. He said he had given his word to the lady and if he did not keep his word, what sort of brahmin would he be then ? No argument, no appeal, no amount of tears could budge him from his position. Finally, Ramkumar, his eldest brother and now the head of the family, had to give in.

Meanwhile, the family's financial position worsened everyday. Ramkumar ran a Sanskrit school in Calcutta and also served as priest in some families. What he earned was pitifully small and he could not send any money home regularly. He decided to bring Gadadhar to Calcutta. His plan was to try to make him study Sanskrit. Perhaps he could also do some priestly work and make some money of his own. Gadadhar arrived, but he lost no time in making it clear that he was not going to study. He, however, did not mind doing some priestly work, not for money but for the pleasure of it.

About this time, a rich woman of Calcutta, Rani Rashmoni, founded a temple at Dakshineswar. She approached Ramkumar to serve as priest at the temple of Kali and Ramkumar agreed. After some persuasion, Gadadhar agreed to decorate the deity. When Ramkumar retired, Gadadhar took his place as priest.

When Gadadhar started worshipping the deity, he began to ask himself if he was worshipping a piece of stone or a living Goddess. If he was worshipping a living Goddess, why should she not respond to his worship ? This question nagged him day and night. Then, he began to pray to Kali, 'Mother, you've been

gracious to many devotees in the past and have revealed yourself to them. Why would you not reveal yourself to me, also ? Am I not also your son ?' He would weep bitterly and sometimes even cry out loudly while worshipping. At night, he would go into a near-by jungle and spend the whole night praying. One day he was so impatient to see Mother Kali that he decided to end his life. He seized a sword hanging on the wall and was about to strike himself with it when he saw light issuing from the deity in waves and he was soon overwhelmed by those waves. He then fell down unconscious on the floor.

Gadadhar was not, however, content with this. He prayed to Mother Kali for more religious experiences. He specially wanted to know what truths other religious systems taught. Strangely enough, teachers of those systems arrived as and when necessary as if directed by some invisible power, and what is more surprising, he reached the goals of those experiments in no time.

Soon word spread about this remarkable man and people of all denominations and all stations of life began to come to him. From now on he came to be known as Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and like a magnet he began to attract real seekers of God. He taught ceaselessly for fifteen years or so through parables, metaphors, songs and above all by his own life the basic truths of religion. He passed away in 1886, leaving behind a devoted band of young disciples headed by the well-known scholar and orator, Swami Vivekananda.

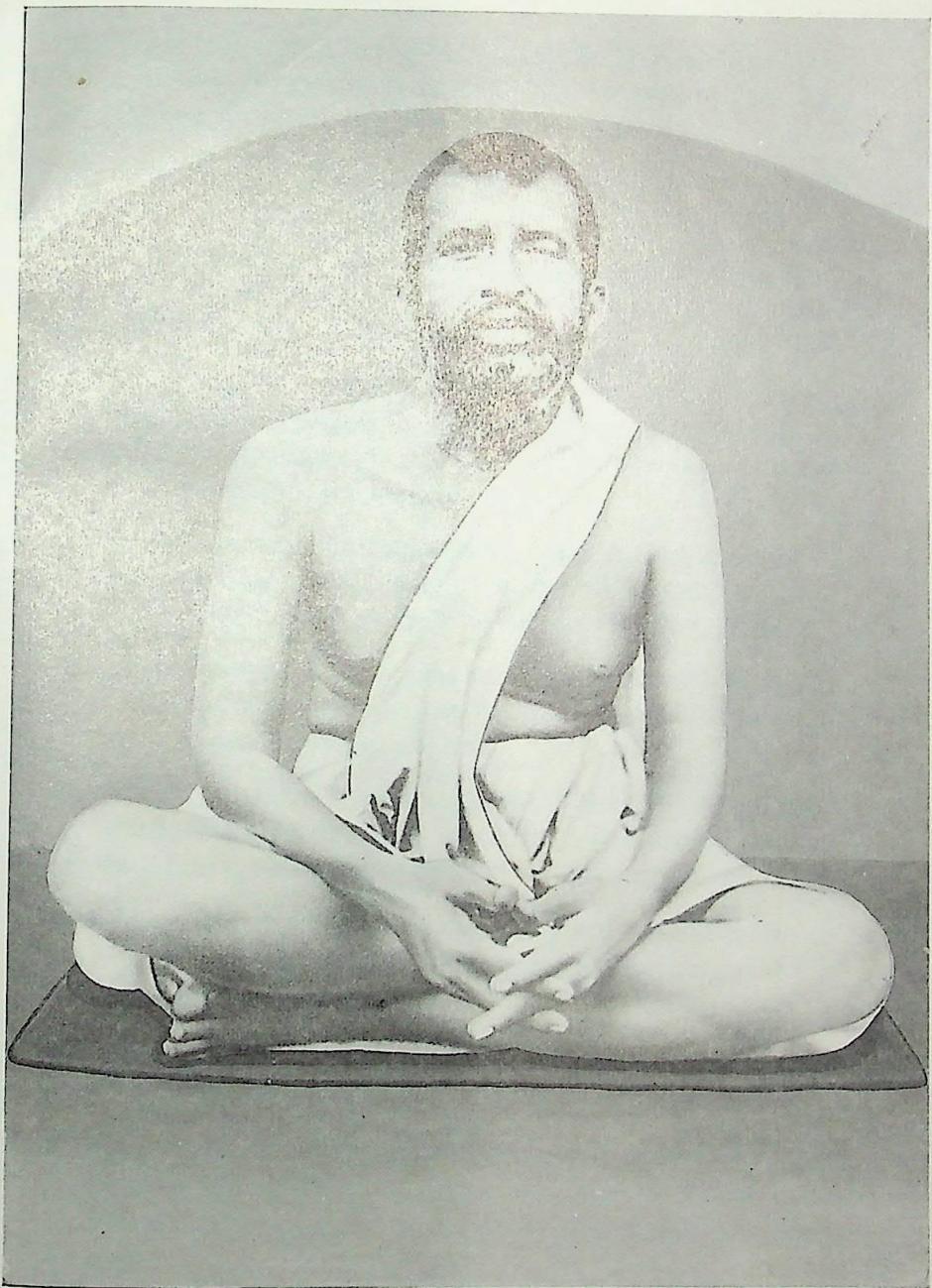
What did Ramakrishna teach ?

1. Ramakrishna taught no creed or dogma. His only concern was man's uplift. According to him there is infinite moral and spiritual potential in man. To develop that potential is man's foremost duty in life. He taught man to strive to develop that potential without wasting time over sense pleasure or religious quibblings.

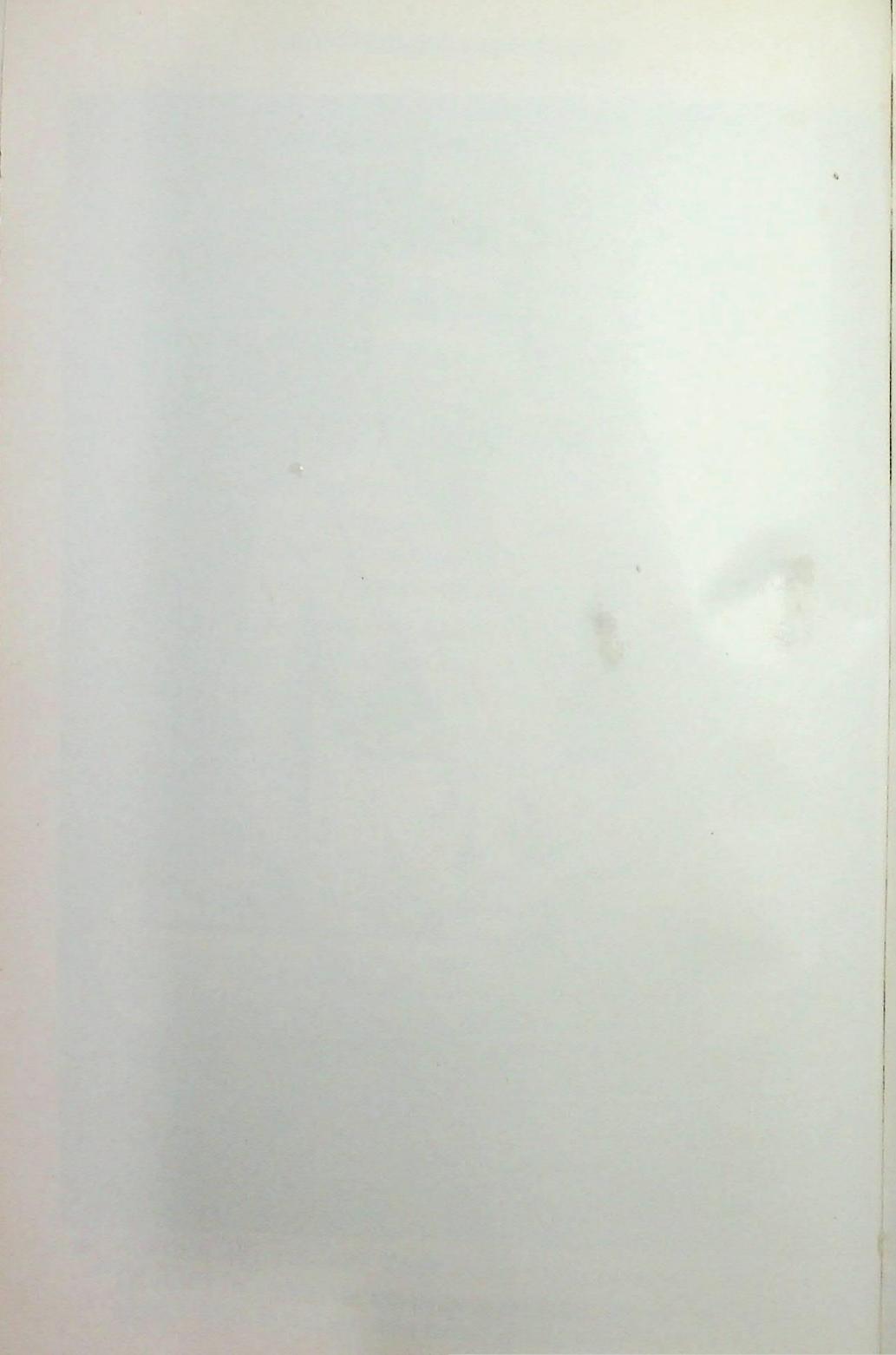
2. Religions are like so-many paths leading to the same goal, i.e., God. Man reaches his religious goal when he attains his highest moral development.
3. God is both personal and impersonal. It is difficult to conceive an impersonal God. So, to begin with, God has to be thought of as a person. Can anyone think of the white colour without thinking of a white object ? One can look at the morning sun, but not at the midday sun. Similarly, when God is manifest in a person we know what God is like, otherwise God is impersonal and beyond thought and speech.
4. Be in the world but not of it. Perform your duties as well as you can, but do not count too much upon the fruits of your action. Rather, surrender them to God. Try to feel as if you are only a tool at the hands of God.
5. Religion is an experience. Religion makes no sense unless its truths are experienced. Is your thirst satisfied unless you drink water when you are thirsty ?
6. God is everywhere but He is most manifest in man. So serve man as God. That is as good as worshiping God.

Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna

- You see many stars in the sky at night, but not when the sun rises. Can you therefore say that there are no stars in the heavens during the day ? O man, because you cannot find God in the days of your ignorance, say not there is no God.
- He is born in vain, who having attained the human birth, so difficult to get, does not attempt to realize God in this very life.
- Seekest thou God ? Then seek Him in man ! His Divinity is manifest more in man than in any other object. Man is the greatest manifestation of God.



Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886)



- Jiva is Shiva (all living beings are God). Who then dare talk of showing mercy to them ? Not mercy, but service, service. For man must be regarded as God.
- There is one whom you may call your own, and that is God.
- I tell you the truth : there is nothing wrong in your being in the world. But you must direct your mind towards God.
- If you say, 'I am a sinner', eternally, you will remain a sinner to all eternity. You ought rather to repeat, 'I am not bound, I am not bound. Who can bind me ? I am the son of God, the king of kings.'
- It is said that truthfulness alone constitutes the spiritual discipline of the Kaliyuga (i.e. modern age). If a man clings tenaciously to truth he ultimately realizes God.
- All religions are true. God can be reached by different religions. Many rivers flow by many ways but they fall into the sea. There all are one.
- A truly religious man should think that other religions also are paths leading to truth. We should always maintain an attitude of respect towards other religions.
- Women whether naturally good or not, whether chaste or unchaste, should always be regarded as images of the Blissful Divine Mother.
- Money can fetch you bread alone. Do not consider it as your sole end and aim.
- He is truly a man to whom money is only a servant; but, on the other hand, those who do not know how to make a proper use of it, hardly deserve to be called men.
- To become great one must be humble. The tree laden with fruit always bends low. So if you wish to be great, be lowly and meek.

- Rainwater never stands on high ground, but runs down to the lowest level. So also the mercy of God remains in the hearts of the lowly, but drains off from those of the vain and the proud.
- The ego that asserts, 'I am the servant of God' is the characteristic of the true devotee. It is the ego of Vidya (Knowledge), and is called the 'ripe' ego.
- Wherein is the strength of a devotee? He is a child of God, and his devotional tears are his mightiest weapon.
- Look at the anvil of a blacksmith—how it is hammered and beaten; yet it moves not from its place. Let men learn patience and endurance from it.
- Visit not miracle-mongers and those who exhibit occult powers. These men are stragglers from the path of Truth.
- Don't find fault with anyone, not even with an insect. As you pray to God for devotion, so also pray that you may not find fault with anyone.
- Purify the spectacles of your mind and you will see that the world is God.
- As the dawn heralds the rising sun, so sincerity, unselfishness, purity, and righteousness precede the advent of the Lord.
- Every man should follow his own religion. A Christian should follow Christianity, and a Mohammedan Mohammedanism. For the Hindu, the ancient path, the path of the Aryan Rishis, is the best.
- Dispute not. As you rest firmly in your own faith and opinion, allow others also equal liberty to stand by their own faith and opinion.
- Man suffers so much simply for want of devotion to God. One should therefore adopt such means as would help the thought of God to arise in the mind at the last moment of one's life. The means is practice of devotion to God.

- Let me be condemned to be born over and over again, even in the form of a dog, if so I can be of help to a single soul.
- I will give up twenty thousand such bodies to help one man. It is glorious to help even one man.



Sri Sarada Devi (1853 - 1920)

Rumours spread to Kamarpukur that Ramakrishna had turned mad as a result of the over-taxing spiritual exercises he had been going through at Dakshineswar. Alarmed, Chandra Devi brought him home and arranged that he might have the best medical care available in a village. The doctors who examined him declared that there was nothing abnormal about him. Chandra Devi who studied him closely also found he was absolutely normal. As he had always done, Ramakrishna sang songs, told stories, cut jokes and made people laugh—that is all. He was interested in everything except in the financial affairs of the family.

Chandra Devi's neighbours advised that if Ramakrishna could be persuaded to marry, he might then be more conscious of his responsibilities to the family and accordingly pay more attention to its financial needs. Chandra Devi started looking for a suitable bride. She did not want Ramakrishna to know anything about her plan, for she feared that he might see marriage as a hindrance to his spiritual progress. Ramakrishna, however, came to know, and far from objecting to the marriage, began to take an active interest in the selection of the bride. He, in fact, mentioned

Jayrambati, three miles to the north-west of Kamarpukur, as being the village where the bride could be found at the house of one Ramchandra Mukherjee. The bride, six-year old and bearing the name, Sarada, was found. The marriage was duly solemnized, the bride went back to her father's house and Ramakrishna to Dakshineswar to resume his spiritual practices.

Years passed and the bride and the bridegroom seldom met. Sarada continued to live at her father's house, helping her poor peasant parents with the usual chores of feeding the cattle, carrying food to the paddy-fields for labourers working for her parents, cooking, cleaning, looking after the younger brothers, and so on. Once famine gripped Jayrambati and its surrounding areas. Starving people went about searching for food, but there was no food anywhere. It so happened that Sarada's parents had saved some food grains that year. They decided to cook some food everyday and distribute it to the starving people, fresh and hot. Sometimes, the hungry people would burn their fingers in eating hot food. Sarada, still a tiny girl, would fan the food to help it cool. She did it on her own.

As Sarada grew older, neighbours began to gossip about her misfortune. They would say that her husband had gone mad. Sarada overheard such remarks and was naturally very disturbed. She decided to go to Dakshineswar and see for herself the condition of her husband. She went and found her husband quite normal. She stayed with him for some time and then returned to Jayrambati. After some years, she permanently stayed with him.

In a way, Sarada Devi was Ramakrishna's first disciple. He taught her as much religion as philosophy. He taught her everything he had learnt from his various Gurus. Ramakrishna must have been pleased to see that

she mastered every religious secret as quickly as he himself had done, perhaps even more quickly. Impressed by her great religious potential, he began to treat her as the Universal Mother Herself. Once she asked him what he thought of her. He said, 'I look upon you as my own mother and as the Mother who is in the temple.'

Ramakrishna fell sick with cancer in the throat. He was removed to Cossipore for treatment. By now he had come to be known as a great religious teacher. Many of the Calcutta elite came under his influence, but Ramakrishna was not satisfied until he had a band of young men who were prepared to mould themselves strictly according to his instructions. Such young men came, fifteen or sixteen in number, all with a good family background and modern education. All of them are now well-known for their later achievements as religious teachers, most of all their leader, Swami Vivekananda, who in fact influenced every aspect of Indian national life. It is this band of young men who later formed the Ramakrishna Order. Before passing away, in 1886, Ramakrishna made Sarada Devi feel as if she was the mother of these young men, nay of the entire humanity. At first, Sarada Devi was shy about playing this role, but slowly, she filled that role, and even became a religious teacher in her own right.

For the thirty-four years or so that she lived after Ramakrishna's passing away, she inspired people, both monastic and lay, with the ideals that Ramakrishna himself had preached and practised. She did this in the same way as Ramakrishna—she lived those ideals. But her life was more testing and complicated than Ramakrishna's. Being an ideal monk, Ramakrishna always kept away from the cross-currents of a family life. He loved to watch the fun called life but was careful enough never to be drawn into its maelstroms.

Sarada Devi, on the contrary, was at the very heart of it. She was the head of a large family comprising men and women, most of them not even distantly related to her. And what an assortment of characters they were ! Some of them were great souls by any standard, but there were also some who were mean, jealous, and positively mischievous. How she managed to keep them all together without losing her balance of mind in the process is a mystery. And each of them was convinced that she loved him or her the best. They were all of them dependent on her, not only spiritually but also materially. She was not only their 'mother' but also their guru. She gave them full satisfaction on both scores.

Sarada Devi had a hard life from beginning to end. As daughter, wife, and finally, as the beloved mother of a large community of people cutting across race and language, there were demands on her much more than a woman in her circumstances normally has to meet. She fulfilled them in a manner possible only for her. But what is remarkable is that, in the midst of all her cares, she maintained a degree of aloofness which Hinduism attributes to the highest and best among men and women. Through the skein of all the varying situations which she faced, she remained absolutely calm as if these were no concern of hers. Her fortitude, courage, and wisdom, tested again and again, amazed everybody.

But the most amazing thing about her was her renunciation, a quality she shared with her husband in a measure equal to, if not more than, his. She often found herself in a situation in which starvation seemed certain, but under no circumstances would she seek aid from any quarter. Even when her disciples had grown to a considerable number and there were people among them with means to keep her in comfort and also

anxious to be of service to her, she would never so far as even drop a hint that she had any difficulty.

She taught not by precepts but by examples. There were irritants galore in the way people around her behaved, but she was an indulgent mother who knew the best way to educate an erring child was to set an example before him, which she did. She had seen the worst side of man, but she never lost faith in him, knowing that, given affection, sympathy, and guidance, he could overcome all his limitations.

She was human, yet divine. Her divinity shone through everything she did, even if it was something entirely mundane. She was a simple woman, but in thought, speech, and action she was attuned to God. She was a true saint, but she never claimed she was. She passed as an ordinary woman, but everything about her was extraordinary.

Sayings of Sarada Devi

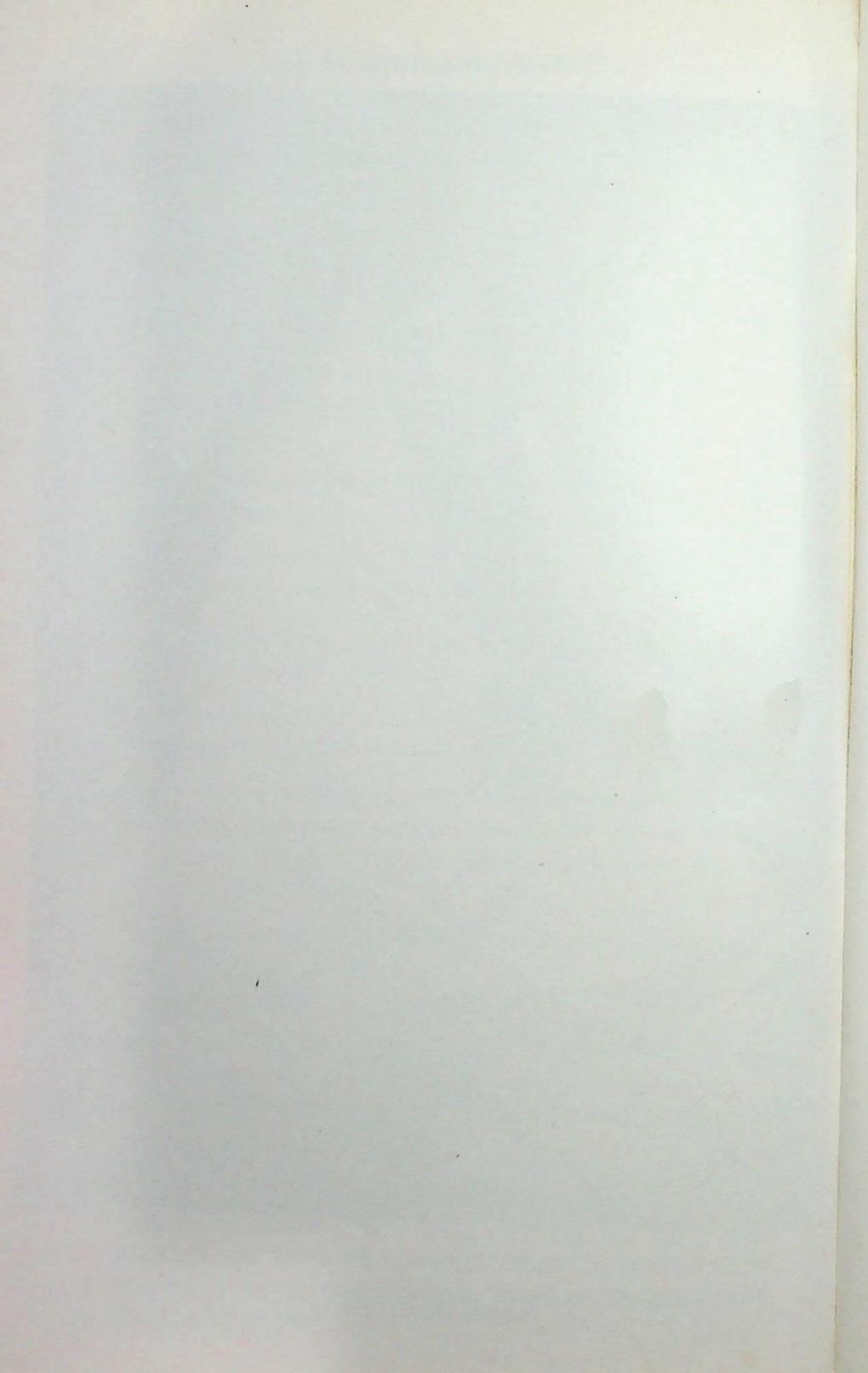
- Sri Ramakrishna left me behind to manifest the Motherhood of God to the world.
- I shan't be able to turn away anybody if he addresses me as Mother.
- I can't contain myself when one draws near me and calls me Mother.
- If my son wallows in the dust or mud, it is I who have to wipe all the dirt off his body and take him to my lap.
- The aim of life is to realize God and remain immersed in contemplation of Him. God alone is real and everything else is false.
- As one gets the fragrance of a flower by handling it, or as one gets the smell of sandalwood by rubbing it

against a stone, in the same way one gets spiritual awakening by constantly thinking of God. But you can realize Him right now, if you become desireless.

- Many think of God only after receiving blows from the world. But blessed indeed is he who can offer his mind, like a fresh flower, at the feet of the Lord from his very childhood. One should practise renunciation in youth.
- Through *japa* and austerity the bondage of *karma* is cut asunder, but God cannot be realized except through love and devotion.
- How can the devotees really have any caste ? Children are all equal.
- One should desire of God desirelessness. For desire alone is at the root of all suffering.
- But one may pray for devotion and detachment. These cannot be classed as desires.
- As wind removes the cloud, so the name of God destroys the cloud of worldliness.
- Only through work can one remove the bondage of work. Total detachment comes later. One should not be without work even for a moment. Work helps one to fend off idle thoughts.
- Everyone has to be accommodating. Forbear everything. God is there to judge.
- One should not hurt others even by words. One must not speak even an unpleasant truth unnecessarily. By indulging in rude words one's nature becomes rude. One's sensibility is lost if one has no control over one's speech.
- One should not trifle with a thing, though it may be very insignificant. If you respect a thing, the thing also respects you. Even a broomstick should be treated with respect. One should perform even an insignificant work with respect.



Sarada Devi (1853-1920)



- We should give everyone his due. What is not edible for a man, give to a cow ; what is not edible for a cow, give to a dog ; what is not edible for a dog, throw into a lake for fishes to eat. But never waste.
- To err is human; but how few know to lead an erring man ?
- No doubt you must do your duties. This keeps your mind in good condition. But it is also necessary to practise *japa*, meditation, and prayer.
- Many are known to do great works under the stress of some strong emotion. But a man's true nature is known from the manner in which he does his insignificant daily task.
- It is idle to expect that dangers and difficulties will not come. They are bound to come. But, for a devotee they will pass away from under the feet like water.
- Misery is truly a gift of God. I believe it is a symbol of His compassion.
- In the fullness of spiritual realization, a person finds that the God who resides in his heart resides in the hearts of all—the oppressed, the persecuted, the lowly and the untouchable. This realization makes one truly humble.
- Love is our forte. It is through love that the Master's family has taken shape.
- Everything, no doubt, happens by God's will, yet man must work because God expresses His will through man's action. Do not relax your spiritual practices.
- The mind is everything. It is in the mind alone that one feels pure and impure. A man, first of all, must make his own mind guilty and then alone can he see another man's guilt.
- If you want peace, do not see the faults of others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child. The whole world is your own.

- My son, if a thorn pricks your foot, it hurts me like a spear entering my heart.
- I am the mother of the wicked, as I am the mother of the virtuous. Whenever you are in distress, just say to yourself, 'I have a mother.'



Swami Vivekananda (1863 -1902)

Swami Vivekananda was born Narendranath Dutta, son of a well-known lawyer of Calcutta, Biswanath Dutta, and a very intelligent and pious lady, Bhuvaneswari Devi, in the year 1863. Biswanath often had scholarly discussions with his clients and friends on politics, religion and society. He would invite Narendranath to join in these discussions and even to express his views on the topics under discussion. Narendra, not in the least embarrassed, would say whatever he thought was right, advancing also arguments in support of his stand. Some of Biswanath's friends resented Naren's presence among them, more so because he had the audacity to talk about matters concerning adults. Biswanath, however, encouraged him. Naren would say: Point out where I'm wrong, but why should you object to my independent thinking?

Naren learnt the Epics and Puranas from his mother, who was a good story-teller. He also inherited her memory among other qualities. He, in fact, owed much to her as he used to say later. Naren was all-round. He could sing, was good at sports, had a ready wit, his range of knowledge was extensive, had a rational frame of

mind and he loved to help people. He was a natural leader. He was much sought after by people because of his various accomplishments.

Naren passed Entrance Examination from the Metropolitan Institution and F.A. and B.A. Examinations from the General Assembly's Institution (now, Scottish Church College). Hastie, Principal of the college, was highly impressed by Naren's philosophical insight. It was from Hastie that he first heard of Sri Ramakrishna.

As a student of Philosophy, the question of God very much haunted his mind. Was there a God ? If there was a God, what was He like ? What were man's relations with Him ? Did He create this world which was so full of anomalies ? He discussed these questions with many, but no one could give him satisfactory answers. He looked to persons who could say that they had seen God, but found none. Meanwhile, Keshab Sen had become the head of the Brahmo Movement. He was a great orator and many young people, attracted by his oratory, enrolled as members of the Brahmo Samaj. Naren also did the same. For some time he was satisfied with what the Brahmo Samaj taught him, but soon he began to feel it did not quite touch the core of the matter, so far as religion was concerned. A relation of his used to advise him to visit Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, who, he said, would be able to remove all his doubts about religion. He happened to meet Ramakrishna at the house of a neighbour, but there is nothing on record about the impression that he created on Naren's mind. He, however, invited Naren to visit him at Dakshineswar some day. As the days passed, Naren began to grow restless about the various riddles that religion presented to him. He particularly wanted to meet a person who could talk about God with the authority of personal experience. Finally, he went to

Ramakrishna one day and asked him straightaway if he had seen God. He said he had; and if Naren so wished, he could even show God to him. This naturally took Naren by surprise. But he did not know what to make of it, for though his simplicity and love of God impressed Naren, his idiosyncrasies made him suspect if Ramakrishna was not a 'monomaniac'. He began to watch him from close quarters and after a long time he was left in no doubt that Ramakrishna was an extraordinary man. He was the only man he had so far met who had completely mastered himself. Then, he was also the best illustration of every religious truth he preached. Naren loved and admired Ramakrishna but he never surrendered his independence of judgment. Interestingly, Ramakrishna himself did not demand it of him, or of any other of his disciples. Nevertheless, Naren gradually came to accept Ramakrishna as his master.

Ramakrishna suffered from cancer and passed away in 1886. During his illness, a group of select young men had gathered round him and began to nurse him while receiving spiritual guidance from him. Naren was the leader of this group. Ramakrishna had wanted that they take to monastic life and had symbolically given them Gerua cloth. They accordingly founded a monastery at Baranagar and began to live together, depending upon what they got by begging. Sometimes they would also wander about like other monks. Naren also would sometimes go travelling. It was while he was thus travelling that he assumed the name of Swami Vivekananda.

Vivekananda travelled extensively through India, sometimes by train, sometimes on foot. He was shocked to see the conditions of rural India—people ignorant, superstitious, half-starved, and victims of caste-tyranny. If this shocked him, the callousness of the so-called educated upper classes shocked him still more. In the

course of his travels he met many princes who invited him to stay with them as their guest. He met also city-based members of the intelligentsia—lawyers, teachers, journalists and government officials. He appealed to all to do something for the masses. No one seemed to pay any heed to him—except the Maharaja of Mysore, the Maharaja of Khetri and a few young men of Madras. Swami Vivekananda impressed on everybody the need to mobilize the masses. A few educated men and women could not solve the problems of the country; the mass power had to be harnessed to the task. He wanted the masses educated. The ruler of Mysore was among the first to make primary education free within his State. This, however, was not enough in Swamiji's view. A peasant could not afford to send his children to school, for he needed their help in his field. He wanted education taken to the peasant's door-step, so that the peasant's children could work and learn at the same time. It was a kind of 'non-formal' education which perhaps he visualized. His letters to the Maharaja of Mysore on the subject show how much thought he had given to the subject and how original he was.

Other princes, or the intelligentsia as a whole, were impressed by Swamiji's personality, but were much too engrossed with their own affairs to pay any heed to his appeals. Some of the young men of Madras, Perumal specially, dedicated himself to the ideals Swamiji propounded and his contributions to the success of his mission were significant. Swamiji could guess the reason why the so-called leaders of society ignored him. Who was he ? A mere wandering monk. There were hundreds of such monks all over the country. Why should they pay any special attention to him ? By and large, they followed only Western thinkers and those Indians who followed the West and had had some recognition in the

West by so doing. It was slave mentality, but that was what characterized the attitude of the educated Indians over most matters. It pained Swamiji to see Indians strutting about in Western clothes and imitating Western ways and manners, as if that made them really Western. Later he would call out to the nation and say, 'Feel proud that you are Indians even if you're wearing a loin-cloth.' He was not opposed to learning from the West, for he knew the Western people had some great qualities and it was because of those qualities that they had become so rich and powerful. He wanted India to learn science and technology from the West and its power to organize and its practical sense, but, at the same time, retain its high moral and spiritual idealism. But the selfishness of the so-called educated people pained him more. They were happy if they could care for themselves and they gave a damn to what happened to other people. Swamiji wanted to draw their attention to the miserable condition of the masses—illiterate, always on the verge of starvation, superstitious and victims of oppression by the upper castes and the rich landlords.

As Swamiji arrived in Madras, young people gathered round him drawn by his bright looks and inspiring talks. They begged him to go to the USA to attend the forthcoming Parliament of Religions in Chicago to represent Hinduism. They even started raising funds for the purpose. Swamiji was at first reluctant but later felt some good might come out of his visit to the West, for if he could make some impression there, his people back at home, who always judged a thing good or bad according as the Western critics thought of it, would then give him a respectful hearing. That is exactly what happened: Swamiji made a tremendous impression, first in the USA and then also in England. The press paid him the highest tributes as

an exponent of India's age-old values; overnight he became a great national hero in India. Suddenly it was brought home to them that there must be something in Indian thought that Western intelligentsia feel compelled to admire. Slowly but inevitably, they began to revise their opinions about their own country and civilization. They began to suspect that perhaps they were not as backward as they once thought, and in areas like religion and philosophy, in art and literature, they were perhaps more advanced than the Western people. They had always felt sorry about themselves, but, now for the first time, they awoke to the richness of their heritage. This was the starting point of the Indian renaissance one hears about. A long succession of national leaders starting from Tilak have drawn inspiration from Swami Vivekananda. They 'discovered' India—her strong and weak points—through him. 'If you want to know India, study Vivekananda,' was Tagore's advice to Romain Rolland. This holds true even today; indeed, no one has studied India's body and mind so thoroughly as Swamiji did.

He described India's neglect of the masses as a national sin. Next to this was the sin of neglecting the womanhood. Caste, in its present form, was yet another sin. India's ethnic and religious pluralism did not worry him, for India had always sought her unity in love and respect to differing sects and communities. He saw socialism coming and he welcomed it—for India as for the rest of the world. The Sudras, i.e. the working people, were sure to come to power, and in order that the transition might be peaceful he asked the brahmins, i.e. the intelligentsia, to pave the way to it. Lest any cultural decline should occur following this shift, he wanted to deluge the country with spiritual thought.

It was Swamiji's hope that India would create a new social order and a new civilization by combining her best spiritual traditions with the latest advancement in science and technology. She would be rich both materially and spiritually. He knew affluence was not enough, man had to be human, too. He wanted India to set an example in this.

Sayings of Swami Vivekananda

- My ideal, indeed, can be put into a few words, and that is : to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.
- Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already in man.
- Religion is the idea which is raising the brute unto man, and man unto God.
- The secret of religion lies not in theories but in practice. To be good and do good—that is the whole of religion.
- Man is higher than all animals, than all angels; none is greater than man.
- One may gain political and social independence, but if one is a slave to his passions and desires, one cannot feel the pure joy of real freedom.
- Look at the wall. Did the wall ever tell a lie ? It is always the wall. Man tells a lie—and becomes a god, too.
- After so much austerity, I have understood this as the real truth—God is present in every *jiva* ; there is no other God besides that. 'Who serves *jiva*, serves God indeed.'
- Cut out the word help from your mind. You cannot help; it is blasphemy ! You worship. When you give a morsel of food to a dog, you worship the dog as God. He is all, and is in all.



Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)



- Unselfishness is God. One may live on a throne, in a palace, and be perfectly unselfish; and then he is in God. Another may live in a hut and wear rags, and have nothing in the world; yet if he is selfish, he is intensely merged in the world.
- All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future.
- With five hundred men, ... the conquest of India might take fifty years : with as many women, not more than a few weeks.
- Religion and religion alone is the life of India, and when that goes, India will die, in spite of politics, in spite of social reforms, in spite of Kubera's wealth poured upon the head of every one of her children.
- Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas.
- We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonizing the Vedas, the Bible, and the Koran. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.
- Who will give the world light ? Sacrifice in the past has been the Law, it will be, alas, for ages to come. The earth's bravest and best will have to sacrifice themselves for the good of many, for the welfare of all.
- Truth, purity, and unselfishness—wherever these are present, there is no power below or above the sun to crush the possessor thereof. Equipped with these, one individual is able to face the whole universe in opposition.

- Everything can be sacrificed for truth, but truth cannot be sacrificed for anything.
- Aye, who ever saw money make the man? It is man that always makes money. The whole world has been made by the energy of man, by the power of enthusiasm, by the power of faith.
- One may gain political and social independence, but if one is a slave to his passions and desires, one cannot feel the pure joy of real freedom.
- The highest ideal is eternal and entire self-abnegation, where there is no 'I', but is 'Thou'.
- All expansion is life, all contraction is death. All love is expansion, all selfishness is contraction. Love is therefore the only law of life. He who loves lives, he who is selfish is dying. Therefore love for love's sake, because it is the only law of life, just as you breathe to live.
- The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.
- The national ideals of India are Renunciation and Service. Intensify her in those channels, and the rest will take care of itself.
- Good motives, sincerity, and infinite love can conquer the world. One single soul possessed of these virtues can destroy the dark designs of millions of hypocrites and brutes.
- The moment you fear, you are nobody. It is fear that is the great cause of misery in the world. It is fear that is the greatest of all superstitions. It is fear that is the cause of our woes, and it is fearlessness that brings heaven even in a moment. Therefore, 'Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached'.

- On this basis—being right and doing right—the whole world can unite.
- Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life—think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success.



Activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

The Order that came into being after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away to keep alive his ideal has now 137 branches in and outside India, with its Headquarters at Belur Math. From legal point of view the organization has two distinct wings—the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission. But this distinction is tenuous, often overlaps and therefore, more theoretical than real. The Math and the Mission are closely related : the Governing Body of the Mission is made up of the Trustees of the Math and the administrative work of the Mission is fully in the hands of the monks of the Math. Though the origin of both the Math and the Mission can be traced back to the days of Baranagar monastery, the Math was registered as a trust only in 1901, and the Mission, a registered society, in 1909, twelve years after it had been started by Swami Vivekananda on 1 May 1897. People, however, loosely use the name 'Ramakrishna Mission' to mean both the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission.

Though both the Math and the Mission take up

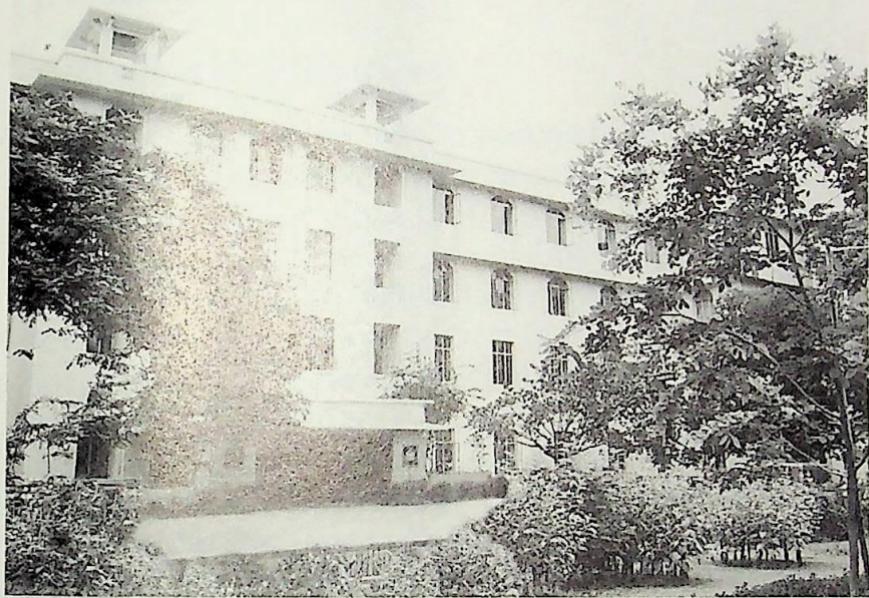
charitable and philanthropic activities, the former lays emphasis on spiritual development of people and the latter gives priority to welfare work. The motto that the twin organizations follow is the same, one that Swami Vivekananda put before them, *Atmano moksartham jagaddhitaya ca*—doing good to the world with a spirit of worship and thus paving paths for one's own salvation. The following paragraphs will show in brief how the Math and the Mission carry out this ideal of Swami Vivekananda into practice:

Relief :

The Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission have been from their very inception doing relief services in times of natural calamities like flood, famine, drought etc. Public support is the principal resource on which relief work depends. During the period 1996-97, the Mission spent Rs. 52.6 lakhs on relief and rehabilitation measures and distributed relief articles worth Rs.11.33 lakhs..

Medical Service :

As part of their programme of service to the sick and the ailing, the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission run indoor hospitals, out-patients' dispensaries, mobile health units, etc. The Mission also runs a T. B. clinic in Delhi, 5 nurses' training centres, and a Medical Research Centre attached to the hospital in Calcutta for post-graduate degree and diploma students. In 1996-97, they conducted altogether (1) 14 hospitals with 2067 beds which served 88,185 indoor patients and 23,82,628 out-patients; (2) 93 out-patients' dispensaries which treated 27,13,482 cases and (3) 29 mobile dispensaries providing medical



Institute of Culture : Views from outside (above) and inside (below)



facilities for 8,18,239 patients. The Mission has also a **T. B. Sanatorium** at Ranchi in Bihar State.

Educational Activities :

A nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence are spread among the masses, said Swami Vivekananda. He urged that 'Education, education, education alone' was the panacea of the problems of India. Therefore, the Math and the Mission, with their limited resources, try their best to provide education for people so that they may play their due role in the making of a better India. Among the educational centres they run at present, there are five **Degree Colleges**, five **Teachers' Training Colleges**, 13 **Higher Secondary Schools**, 32 **Secondary Schools** and 134 **Schools of different denominations**, 7 **Junior Technical Industrial Schools**, two Institutes of Agriculture, two Schools of Languages, one Sanskrit College, two Sanskrit Schools, four Polytechnics, one Computer Centre, and 152 non-formal education units. Besides, they have 97 Students' homes and hostels, five Orphanages and also a Blind Boys' Academy. The total number of students who had education in these Institutions during the year 1996-97 was 1,25,326, of which 89,141 were boys and 36,185 girls.

Work for Women :

'All nations have achieved greatness by paying proper respect to women' and a country cannot progress by neglecting its womenfolk, just as a bird cannot fly only on one wing, said Swami Vivekananda. Therefore, the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission do not neglect or look down upon women. Relief and medical services are rendered to men and women alike. A woman can visit the shrine of a centre, attend its public

celebrations, classes and meetings, enjoy library facilities just as a man does. Besides, some of the centres have units working exclusively for women. To name only a few of them: (i) **Maternity sections at the hospitals in Calcutta, Trivandrum and Vrindaban,** (ii) the **Domiciliary and Maternity Clinics at Jalpaiguri and Khetri,** (iii) the **Invalid Women's Home at Varanasi,** (iv) the **Sarada Vidyalaya at Madras,** (v) three **Girls' High Schools at Jamshedpur,** (vi) the **Sarada Mandir at Sarisha** and (vii) four **Training Schools for nurses at Trivandrum, Vrindaban, Itanagar, and Calcutta.**

Through literature and preaching, the monks of the Ramakrishna Order keep the malefolk reminding of their duties toward women, of the respect they ought to show them. But keeping in mind Vivekananda's views that the women's problems could be handled best if they were taken care of by women themselves and that male interference in women's affairs might do more harm than good, they work for women only in a limited way. The major portion of this task they leave to be accomplished by the Ramakrishna Sarada Math and Sarada Mission, which is exclusively a women's organization, having the same ideals but completely separate from the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission.

Work for the Youth :

Vivekananda's hope and confidence lay in the youth of the country. The Math and the Mission, therefore, pay special attention to the youth, to their moral uplift in particular. Apart from the good number of schools and colleges they run, the monks always try to keep in touch with the youth. Through study circles, seminars, and youth forums, the youth are made acquainted with the

messages of Swami Vivekananda. Special mention should be made in this connection of the Vivekananda Study Circle of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta. It is a youth forum which meets once every fortnight at the Institute and organizes youth conventions in Calcutta and rural areas at weekends.

Attention to Weaker Sections :

While providing education, medical services and distress relief, the Ramakrishna Math and the Mission pay special attention to those who are weak from both material and cultural points of view. The centres at Along, Narottamnagar, Itanagar and Narainpur are fully dedicated to the welfare of the tribal people and a few more centres do the tribal welfare work as part of their activities. The Pallimangal Section of Ramakrishna Math, the centres at Belur, Narendrapur, Ranchi, Purulia and Raipur are engaged in rural development work on a large scale. The aim is to make the poor and the backward people stand on their own feet, to expose them to the mainstream of Indian culture and to raise them to a status of equality with the rest of the countrymen.

All these services are done in no spirit of pity but in a spirit of worship, the receiver being considered God while the giver as the blessed worshipper. Another distinctive feature of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission is that they never hurt the religious beliefs of people whom they are serving. To this Order of monks, all religions are equally true and, therefore, religious conversion is unnecessary and undesirable.

Spiritual and Cultural Work :

Both the Math and the Mission lay emphasis on the

dissemination of the spiritual and cultural ideas of India. They do this through regular classes, meetings, public celebrations, publication of books, etc. Attempts are made by these means to make people aware of their moral and spiritual legacy, of the fact that life becomes worthwhile when one lives for others. In the case of religion, they preach only the universal truths of the Vedanta as exemplified in Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings. People are made to understand that they are potentially divine and they have immense possibilities. They are also taught to respect all religions as valid paths to the same God and love all beings as their own selves.

These messages are carried to a larger section of people through the publication of books and journals on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta and Indology. More than ten centres publish books, in English, Bengali, Hindi, and other Indian languages, and at present the Math and the Mission have about 700 titles and 12 monthly journals.

Foreign Centres :

The Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission have a network of branches all over the world. With their faith in the inherent divinity of man and equal validity of all religions taught by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, the Math and the Mission are inspired by the principle of give-and-take in their dealings with the West. As Swami Vivekananda said, India has to learn from the West the conquest of external nature while the West has to learn from India the conquest of internal nature. The two cultures are thus complementary to each other. The Math and the Mission have centres in the U. S. A., England, France, Canada, Fiji, Japan, Mauritius, Bangladesh, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, and Argentina (South America).

The nature of work in the foreign countries is mainly of preaching. The stress is given on leading a sincere spiritual life and along with this is taught how one can respect other religions without losing one's one religious faith.



The Ramakrishna Movement

When it started in 1897, the Ramakrishna Order consisted of a dozen monks or so and had practically no assets. Even now with its 137 centres and barely a thousand monks, it is small compared with the Christian organizations, but it is a name that commands respect all over India and even outside. What is the secret behind this? What exactly do its monks do in India and abroad? It must be made clear at once that the Ramakrishna Mission does not believe in conversion in the sense of the word as understood in common parlance. If anything, these monks try to make 'a Hindu a better Hindu, a Moslem a better Moslem, a Christian a better Christian' and so on. In other words, they ask people to go to the root of religion, which is trying to reach God somehow or other and not merely talking about Him. They quote different prophets and different scriptures to show how in essence they preach the same thing. Their language differs, but their purport is the same. They do not want to replace any system but want to draw attention to the fact that there is much in common between one system and another. In all matters of religion, their approach is 'one of respect and understanding. Because of this approach, they feel as much at home among non-Hindus as among Hindus. Because of this approach, non-Hindus also feel at home

in their company; as a matter of fact they like these monks and often invite them to their services. Today ecumenism has become an active force in the Christian world. It must not be forgotten that long before Pope John gave official blessings to this, Ramakrishna had preached and practised it. His ecumenism was much broader though, for it embraced not some denominations but all denominations of all religions.

Today the Ramakrishna Movement has become a great power for peace and happiness in this country as well as outside. In India where different religious sects and communities live, the idea of tolerance and brotherly feelings towards each other has great relevance. Another factor which contributes much to its popularity is the rational approach it brings to bear upon every vital problem of life. People who are influenced by Ramakrishna believe religion to be a kind of science open to study and investigation. They do not agree that religious truths have to be accepted on trust; they rather declare that nothing need be accepted as final unless it has been tested and found true. Experience, personal and immediate, is the only acceptable proof of religion.

The fact that the Movement lays great stress on selfless service as a means of God-realization also attracts many people. The service it gives is open to all, irrespective of caste or creed or language. Not only the Ramakrishna Mission but hundreds of institutions which have sprung up all over the country today give this kind of service. Since the time of Buddha this is almost without parallel in India. What is significant is that most of them bear the name of Ramakrishna and draw inspiration from him.

As time passes, the Ramakrishna Movement is growing from strength to strength. People all over the country want the Mission to open more branch centres—schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages etc., for they

know that the quality of service they will get from the Mission will be better than what they may get elsewhere. Their requests are almost always accompanied by offers of money, land, and buildings, but the Mission proceeds cautiously and avoids proliferation unless there is a compelling reason in its favour. Apart from the fact that it suffers from shortage of manpower, it prefers that people themselves come forward to start such institutions, imbued with the spirit of selfless service. Happily, the present trend clearly shows that this spirit is fast spreading.

As the Movement spreads the attitude of the common people towards religion is also changing. Previously, religion was equated with rituals, but now people realize that religion is essentially a science of 'being and becoming', something that concerns man's inner nature. The habit of prayer is good but if this is not accompanied by a corresponding improvement in one's nature, it is not worth much. Another change that is noticeable today is respect for religions other than one's own. There was once much arrogance in the attitude of people towards the religions of others, but there is now humility and a spirit of enquiry if not also reverence.

Ruskin once said, 'An idea is more powerful than an army'. There must be much truth in this, else it is difficult to explain the influence Ramakrishna and the Order of monks bearing his name have had over people all over the world. The strength of the Ramakrishna Movement is not in money, men or organization but in the ideas it tries to present. These ideas are fast spreading, and wherever they are spreading they are producing a great impact. Silently but inevitably, they are changing the minds of the people who come under their influence. They act like a catalytic agent transforming their personalities.

**Addresses of the Headquarters and Branches of the
Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission**

Headquarters

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission
P.O. Belur Math, Dt. Howrah, West Bengal 711202, India
PBX Phones : 033-6541144, 6541180, 6545391, 6549581 & 6549681
Fax : 033-6544346

Centres in India

ANDAMAN

Ramakrishna Mission
Port Blair, Andaman 744104
Phones : 03192-32432 / 34538

ANDHRA PRADESH

Ramakrishna Math
Ramakrishna Math Marg
Domalguda
Hyderabad 500029
Phones : 040-7633936 & 7633937
040-7635545

Ramakrishna Math &
Ramakrishna Mission
Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Nagar
Rajahmundry
Dt. East Godavari 533105
Phone : 0883-73112

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama
Ramakrishna Beach
Visakhapatnam 530003
Phones : 0891-562561 / 533186

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Ramakrishna Mission
P.O. Along
Dt. West Siang 791001
Phones: 03783-22455 / 22249 / 22349
Fax : 03783-22716

Ramakrishna Mission Hospital
P.O. R. K. Mission
Itanagar 791113
Tele. Add : AROGYA
Phones : 0360-21263 / 211370 &
212-761

Ramakrishna Mission
P.O. Narottam Nagar
Via Deomali
Dt. Tirap 786629
Tele. Add.: NAROTTAM
Phones : Deomali : 03786-55236,
03786-55262 / 55237

ASSAM

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama
Ramakrishna Mission Road
Ulubari, Guwahati
Dt. Kamrup 781007
Phones : 0361-540760 & 540691

Ramakrishna Math &
Ramakrishna Mission Seva Samiti
P.O. & Dt. Karimganj 788710
Phone : 03843-2272

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama
P.O. Silchar
Dt. Cachar 788004
Phone : 03842-33789

BIHAR

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith
 P. O. Vidyapith
Deoghar 814112
 Phone : 06432-22413
 Fax : 06432-22360

Ramakrishna Mission
 Vivekananda Society
Bistupur, Jamshedpur 831001
 Phones : 0657-423795, 430699
 Fax : 430700

Ramakrishna Math
P. O. Jamtara
 Dt. Dumka 815351

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama
 P.O. & Dt. Katihar 854105
 Phones : 06452-22449 & 23108

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama
 Ramakrishna Avenue
Patna 800004
 Phone : 0612-670815

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama
 11-12 Sw. Vishuddhananda Road
Morabadi, Ranchi 834008
 Phones : 0651-304970 & 202828
 Fax : 0651-207697

Ramakrishna Mission
 T.B. Sanatorium
 P.O. Ramakrishna Sanatorium
Ranchi 835221
 Tele. Add.: RECOVERY
 Phones : 0651-408737 & 408149

DELHI

Ramakrishna Mission
 Ramakrishna Ashrama Marg
New Delhi 110055
 Phones : 011-527110 & 7773023
 Fax 011-3544985

GUJARAT

Ramakrishna Mission
Limbdhi
 Dt. Surendranagar 363421
 Phones : 02753-20228 & 20537

Ramakrishna Mission
 Vivekananda Memorial
 Swami Vivekananda Marg
Porbandar, Dt. Junagadh 360575
 Phone : 0286-21244

Ramakrishna Ashrama
 Dr. Yajnik Road
Rajkot 360001
 Phones : 0281-452000 & 445200
 Fax : 0281-452000

HARYANA & PUNJAB

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama
 Sector 15-B Madhya Marg
Chandigarh 160015
 Phone : 0172-549477

KARNATAKA

Ramakrishna Math &
 Ramakrishna Mission (Shivanahalli)
 Bull Temple Road
Bangalore 560019
 Phones: 080-6613149 & 6675351
 Fax : 080-6613149

Ramakrishna Math &
 Ramakrishna Mission
 Mangaladevi Road
Mangalore
 Dt. Dakshina Kannada 575001
 Phones : 0824-423412 & 428432

Ramakrishna Ashrama
 Yadavagiri, Mysore 570020
 Phone : 0821-510535

Ramakrishna Saradashrama
P.O. Ponnampet
 Dt. Kodagu 571216
 Phones : 08274-49040 & 49369

KERALA

Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama
P. O. Kalady
 Dt. Ernakulam 683574
 Phone : 0484-462345

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama
 P.O. Arts & Science College
Kozhikode 673018
 Phone : 0495-304191

Ramakrishna Math
 P.O. Arunapuram
Palai
 Dt. Kottayam 686574
 Phone : 0482-212193

Ramakrishna Math
 Swami Vivekananda Road
 P.O. Melur, **Quilandy**
 Dt. Kozhikode 673319
 Phone : 0496-630990

Ramakrishna Ashrama
 Sasthamangalam
Thiruvananthapuram 695010
 Phones : 0471-322125, 322453,
 326603, 327393 & 327607

Ramakrishna Math
 Vilangan
 P.O. Puranattukara
Dt. Thrissur 680551
 Phones : 0487-711719 & 4941231

Ramakrishna Ashrama
 Thukalassery
Tiruvalla
 Dt. Pathanamthitta 689101
 Phone : 04736-23125

MADHYA PRADESH

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama
 (Abujhmarh Tribal Service)
Narainpur
 Dt. Bastar 494661
 Phone 07786-52251

Ramakrishna Mission
 Vivekananda Ashrama
 P.O. Vivekananda Ashrama
Raipur 492001
 Phones: 0771-224119, 544959 & 225269

MAHARASHTRA

Ramakrishna Math &
 Ramakrishna Mission
 Ramakrishna Mission Marg
 Khar (West)
Mumbai 400052
 Phones : 022-6494760 & 6464363
 Fax : 022-6048568

Ramakrishna Math
 Dhantoli
Nagpur 440012
 Phones : 0712-523422 & 532690

Ramakrishna Math
 131-1A Vitthalwadi Road
Pune 411030
 Phone : 0212-535132, 533779

MEGHALAYA

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama
 Cherrapunji
 East Khasi Hills 793111
 Phones : 03637-22242 & 22202

Ramakrishna Mission
 Ramakrishna Mission Road
 Laitumkhrah
Shillong 793003
 Phones : 0364-230079 & 221709

ORISSA

Ramakrishna Math &
Ramakrishna Mission
Vivekananda Marg
Bhubaneswar 751002
Phones : 0674-432028 & 430059

Ramakrishna Math
Chakratartha
Puri 752002
Phone : 06752-22479

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama
Puri 752001
Phone : 06752-22207

RAJASTHAN

Rarnakrishna Mission
'C' Scheme, Gautam Marg
Jaipur 302001
Phone : 0141-381704

Ramakrishna Mission
Vivekananda Smriti Mandir
Khetri 333503
Phone : 01593-33312

TAMIL NADU

Ramakrishna Mission
Hanumanthaputheri
Chengalpattu 603002
Phones : 04114-26217 & 26536

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya
P.O. Sri Ramakrishna Vidyalaya
Coimbatore 641020
Tele. Add: KALVI
Phones : 0422-892676 & 892667
Fax : 0422-892582

Ramakrishna Math
Opp. Govt. Cancer Hospital
P.O. Karaipettai
Kanchipuram
Dt. Chengalpattu 631552
Phone : 04112-21494

Ramakrishna Math
16 Ramakrishna Math Road
Post Box 635
Mylapore, Chennai 600004
Phones : 044-4941231 & 4941959
Fax : 044-4934589
Email: srkmath@giasmd01.vsnl.net.in

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama
26 Duraiswamy Road
Tyagarayanagar
Chennai 600017
Phones : 044-8283896 & 8283514
Fax : 044-8227223

Ramakrishna Mission
Sarada Vidyalaya
27 Usman Road
Tyagarayanagar
Chennai 600017
Phone : 044-8280153

Ramakrishna Mission
Students' Home
101 Sir P.S. Sivaswami Salai
Mylapore, Chennai 600004
Phone : 044-4990264
Email: rkmshome@giasmd01.vsnl.net.in

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith
45 Oliver Road
Mylapore
Chennai 600004
Phones : 044-4993057 & 4992815

Ramakrishna Math
New Natham Road
Narayananapuram
Madurai 625014
Phone : 0452-45224

Ramakrishna Math
P.O. Nattarampalli
Dt. North Arcot 635852
Phone : 04179-42227

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Ramakrishna Math
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 Phones : 0522-385574, 371277 &
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 Fax : 0522-385574
 Email: rkmvpiko@1w1.vsnl.net.in

Advaita Ashrama
P.O. Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
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Calcutta Branch :
 Advaita Ashrama
 5 Dehi Entally Road
Calcutta 700014
 Tele. Add: VEDANTA
 Phones : 033-2440898, 2452383 &
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Vivekananda Ashrama

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Dt. Champawat 262523

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Ramakrishna Mission

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Luxa, Varanasi 221010

Phones : 0542-321727 & 320776

Ramakrishna Math &

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Phones : 0565-442310, 443310 &
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Fax : 0565-443310

Ramakrishna Math

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Phones : 033-5339292, 554-2403 &
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Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama

P.O. & Dt. **Bankura 722101**

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Ramakrishna Mission

Institute of Culture

Gol Park, Calcutta 700029

Tele. Add: INSTITUTE

Phones : 033-464 1303 (3 lines)

466 1235 (3 lines)

Fax : 033-464 1307

Email : rmicsl@giascl01.vsnl.net.in

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 Phone 03217-47225

Ramakrishna Math &
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 Sevashrama
 P. O. Tamluk
 Dt. Midnapore-721636
 Phones : 03228-66005 & 66762

Centres outside India

ARGENTINA

Hogar Espiritual de Ramakrishna
 Gaspar Campos 1149
 1661 Bella Vista, Buenos Aires
 Phone : 54-1-6660098
 Fax : 54-1-3085175
 Email: saradama@teletel.com.ar

Ramakrishna Ashrama &
 Ramakrishna Mission
 Dinajpur
 Phone 880-531-3262

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BANGLADESH

Ramakrishna Ashrama
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 Meerabazar, Sylhet

CANADA

Vedanta Society of Toronto
 120 Emmatt Avenue
 Toronto, Ontario M6M 2E6
 Phone : 1-416-2453764

FIJI

Ramakrishna Mission
 Ashram Road, Post Box 716
 Nadi, South Pacific
 Phone : 679-702786
 Fax: 679-702193

FRANCE

Centre Vedantique Ramakrichna
 1 Boulevard Romain Rolland
 77220 Gretz
 Phone : 33-1-64070311
 Fax: 33-1-64420357

JAPAN

Nippon Vedanta Kyokai
 4-18-1 Hisagi
 Zushi-shi 249
 Kanagawa-ken
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 Fax : 81-0468-730592
 Email: vedanta@ppp.bekkoame.or.jp

MAURITIUS

Ramakrishna Mission
 Quinze Cantons, Vacoas
 Phone : 230-6964313

NETHERLANDS

Ramakrishna Vedanta Vereniging
 Nederland
 De Vlaschaard 57
 1183 KM Amstelveen
 Phone & Fax : 31-20-4410155

RUSSIA

Obschestvo Ramakrishni—
 Centr Vedanti
 Ulitsa Krasnogo Mayaka
 House 8, Korp II, Apt. 74
 Moscow 113519
 Phone: 7-095-3132051

SINGAPORE

Ramakrishna Mission
 179 Bartley Road
 Singapore 539784
 Phones : 65-2889077 & 3835741
 Fax : 65-2885798
 Email: sarada@mbox2.singnet.com.sg

SRILANKA

Ramakrishna Mission
 40 Ramakrishna Road,
 Colombo 6
 Phone : 94-1-588253

SWITZERLAND

Centre Vedantique
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UNITED KINGDOM

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre
 Unity House
 Blind Lane
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 Cable Add.: VEDANTA
 Phone : 44-162-8526464
 Fax : 44-162-8532437

**UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA**

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 Phone 1-510-8488862

Ramakrishna Vedanta Society
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Boston, Massachusetts 02215
 Phone : 1-617-5365320

Vivekananda Vedanta Society
 5423 South Hyde Park Blvd.
Chicago, Illinois 60615
 Phone : 1-773-3630027
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 California
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 Phone : 1-213-4657114
 Fax : 1-213-4659568

Vedanta Society
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 Fax : 1-212-7694280

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda
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 Cable Add: RAMAVIVEK, New York
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 Fax : 1-212-8281618

Vedanta Society
1157 S.E. 55th Avenue
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 Phone & Fax : 1-503-2353919
 Email: vedanta@cyberhighway.net

Vedanta Society
224 Angell Street
Providence, RI 02906
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San Francisco, California 94123
 Phone : 1-415-9222323
 Fax : 1-415-9221476
 Email: sfvedanta@juno.com

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 Washington
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Washington 98102
 Phone : 1-206-3231228
 Fax : 1-206-3291791
 E-mail: vedantanw@aol.com

Vedanta Society of St. Louis
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St. Louis, Missouri 63105
 Phone : 1-314-7215118
 Fax 1-314-8620990



The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture

Among the centres of cultural activities of the Ramakrishna Mission, special mention should be made of its Institute of Culture, Calcutta (from where this brochure is published). The Institute was started in 1938 as an offshoot of Sri Ramakrishna's first birth-centenary celebration held in 1936. With humble beginnings in small rented rooms in North Calcutta, the Institute has grown over the years, and the fact that it now occupies its present magnificent building in South Calcutta is a testimony to its popularity.

ACTIVITIES

Cultural Programmes

Throughout the year the Institute has a busy schedule of lectures, debates, elocution competitions, seminars, symposia, study circles, and scripture classes, and religious congregations, through which knowledge, both modern and ancient, is imparted to the public. Devotional songs and Indian classical music also constitute regular features of the Institute's activities all round the year.

Vivekananda Study Circle

To encourage the youth to study Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature the Institute has several programmes of which the Vivekananda Study Circle

is one. The Study Circle meets twice a month at the Institute premises and organizes youth conventions in the city and rural areas jointly with the local youth bodies. In 1997-98, 66 such conferences were held. The Study Circle has also a junior wing, for the members of the Children's and Junior Sections of the Institute's Library. It meets once a month.

School of Languages

Since language is a barrier to understanding others, the Institute regards the teaching of languages as an integral part of its work in the field of intercultural exchange. The Institute's SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES, with over 8,000 students on the roll, teaches 14 languages : Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Japanese, Latin, Persian, Russian, Sanskrit, Spanish, Spoken English, and Urdu.

International House

Attached to the Institute there is an International House meant for the Institute's guests and for the scholars and the students who come from different parts of India as well as from abroad at the invitation of the Institute or of universities and other learned societies. They come to stay here for study and research or simply for exchange of ideas with Indian scholars. This bringing together of scholars of different nationalities helps create a bridge that unites minds and spirits having different backgrounds.

Library

To assist scholars in their work of study and research, the Institute has a General Library, with a

reading room attached to it. The Library specializes in the humanities and social sciences and contains over 1,88,148 books and 424 Indian and foreign journals.

The Library also has a JUNIOR Section with over 6,182 books for children between 13 and 16, and a CHILDREN'S Section with over about 14,000 books for children between 6 and 12. Children of both the Sections, constituting Vivekananda Study Circle (Junior), present regular musical and cultural programmes throughout the year.

Research

Calcutta, Jadavpur, and Burdwan Universities recognize the Institute as a centre for learning and research. This entitles the Institute to guide scholars in their pre-doctoral and post-doctoral research. A Board of Studies and Research consisting of distinguished scholars plans and co-ordinates the research activities of the Institute. The Indian Council of Social Science Research, the Indian National Science Academy, Rashtriya Sanskrit Samsthan, and the Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, also recognize the Institute as a centre for research.

Museum and Art Gallery

The Institute has a small Museum and Art Gallery to help people, specially scholars from outside India, have a glimpse of Indian art in its diverse forms. It has four major sections : (i) Paintings, (ii) Sculptures, (iii) Folk Arts, and (iv) MSS. Attached to it is the Sarada Devi School of Fine Arts and Crafts for Children between 8 and 12 and a permanent exhibition on the Ramakrishna Movement.

Publications

The Institute's publications, including the monthly *Bulletin*, represent a further attempt on the part of the Institute to help educate the public about culture in all its aspects. Its major attempt in this direction is *The Cultural Heritage of India*, an encyclopaedic work in eight volumes, six of which have so far been published. The speciality of these volumes is that they project India's accumulated wisdom in a planned manner with contributions from well-known scholars. Among its other major publications are *Religions of the World* (2 Vols), *Concordance*, *Upanishads*, *Vivekananda in Contemporary Indian News*, *A Portrait of Sri Ramakrishna*, *Shatarupe Sarada* (Bengali), *Chintanayak Vivekananda* (Bengali), *Sri Ramakrishner Priya Sangeet* (Bengali), *Amar Bharat Amar Bharat* (Bengali), *Shabdashastrer Itihas* (Bengali), *Vivekanander Vedanta Chinta* (Bengali), etc.

Prayer Room and Chapel

In keeping with the spirit which animates all its activities, the Institute has a UNIVERSAL PRAYER ROOM, open to all, where people can pray and meditate in the manner they like best. There is also a CHAPEL dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna, the symbol of harmony and unity, where regular devotional services are held in the evenings.

The Institute on Internet

The Institute has gone on Internet this year, the address of its homepage being www.sriramakrishna.org. Though hosted by the Institute, the homepage gives a general idea on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda

ideology and the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission as a whole. Some of the salient features of the Institute's website are : life-sketches and sayings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, life sketches of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, activities of the Ramakrishna Mission, list of publications with brief introductions to them, select pages from the important publications and addresses of the centres of the Ramakrishna Mission spread over the world. It also points to other websites on Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda hosted by the Ramakrishna Order and others. The website is updated from time-to-time and soon the Bulletin of the Institute will be available online.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WORK OF THE INSTITUTE

As an institution dedicated to the ideal of the unity of mankind, the Institute has endeavoured over the years to make people aware of the richness of the cultures of the world and also of the urgent need for intercultural appreciation and understanding. The keynote of everything the Institute does is : respect of others' points of view, and assimilation and acceptance of as much of them as possible for one's own enrichment.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the Institute is open to anyone in sympathy with its aims and activities. An admission fee of Rs 5.00 and annual membership fee of Rs 60.00 or \$ 15.00 or £ 8.00 or life membership of Rs 1,000.00

or more entities members to receive the Bulletin, use the Library, and receive a concession of twenty per cent on the Institute's publications. One may become a benefactor enjoying all the privileges of a life member by donating Rs 5,000.00 or more.

All correspondence to be addressed to :

Swami Lokeswarananda

Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture
Gol Park, Calcutta 700 029

Telegraphic address : INSTITUTE

Telephone : (91-33-) 464-1303 (3 lines), 466-1235 (3 lines)

Fax : (91-33-) 464-1307

E-mail : rmicsl@giascl01.vsnl.net.in

Webpage : www.sriramakrishna.org

**RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA AND
VEDANTA LITERATURE**
(Selected books in English)

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• Sri Ramakrishna : The Great Master (Sri Ramakrishna's Biography, 2 Vols.)—Swami Saradananda	...	120.00
• The Life of Sri Ramakrishna—Romain Rolland (Rexine)	...	45.00
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● Swami Vivekananda : His Life and Message	P. 80	5.00
● Eternal Values	P. 32	2.50
● Swami Vivekananda : The Friend of All	P. 60	2.00
● The Ramakrishna Movement	P. 40	2.00
● Great Sayings (Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda)	P. 64	2.00

The books you must read : our suggestion

- Sri Ramakrishna : The Great Master ● The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna
- Life of Swami Vivekananda : by His Eastern and Western admirers ● Life of Sri Sarada Devi ● Apostles of Sri Ramakrishna
- Among the works of Swami Vivekananda : Chicago Addresses, Lectures from Colombo to Almora, Jnana-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, Karma-Yoga, Raja-Yoga, Letters of Swami Vivekananda (or the 9 Vols. of Complete Works) ● Eternal Companion ● The Way to God as taught by Sri Ramakrishna ● Swami Vivekananda in America : New Discoveries.

All correspondence to be addressed to :

Swami Lokeswarananda

Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture
Gol Park, Calcutta 700 029

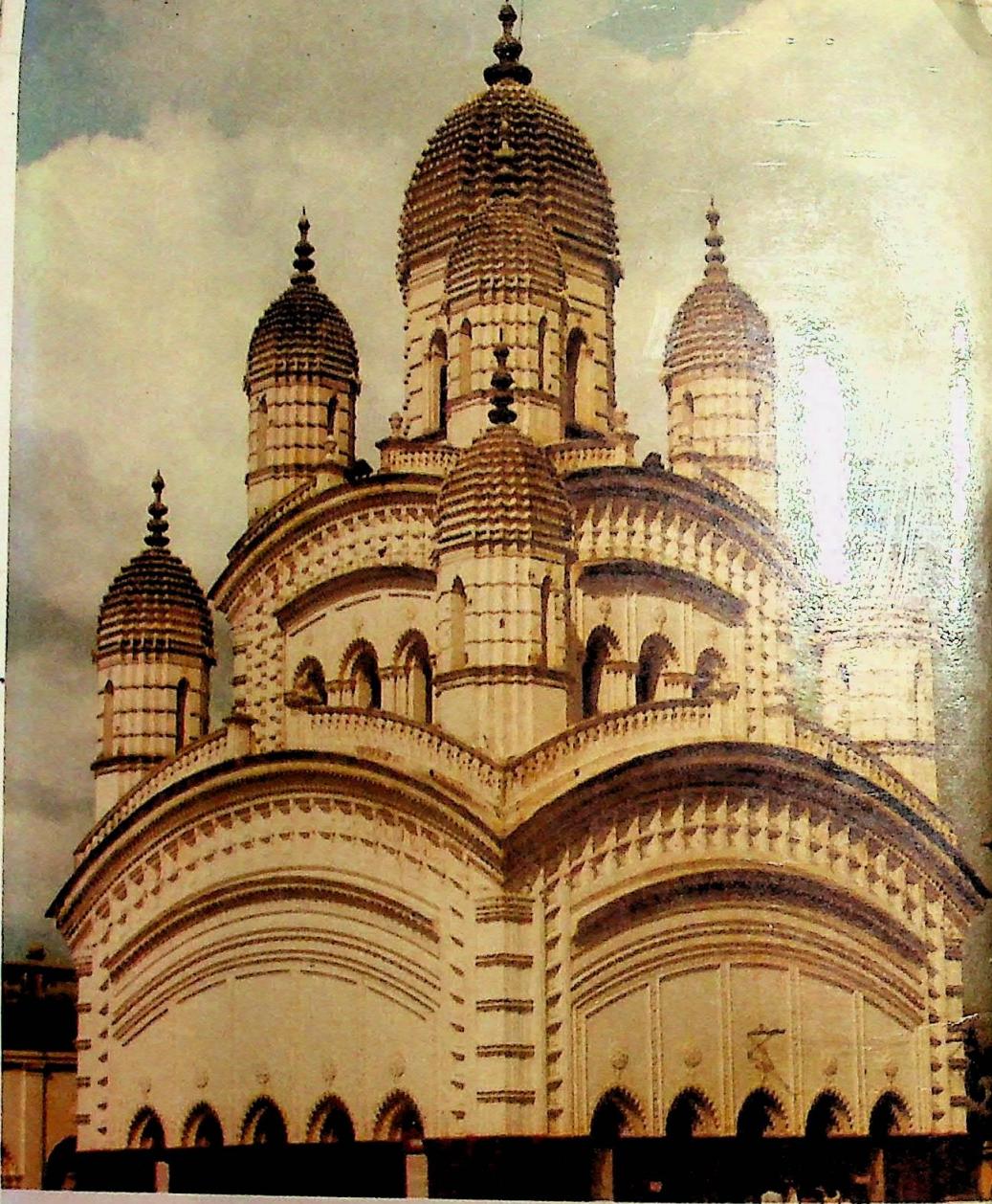
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Telephone : (91-33-) 464-1303 (3 lines), 466-1235 (3 lines)

Fax : (91-33-) 464-1307

E-mail : rmicsl@giascl01.vsnl.net.in

Webpage : www.sriramakrishna.org



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